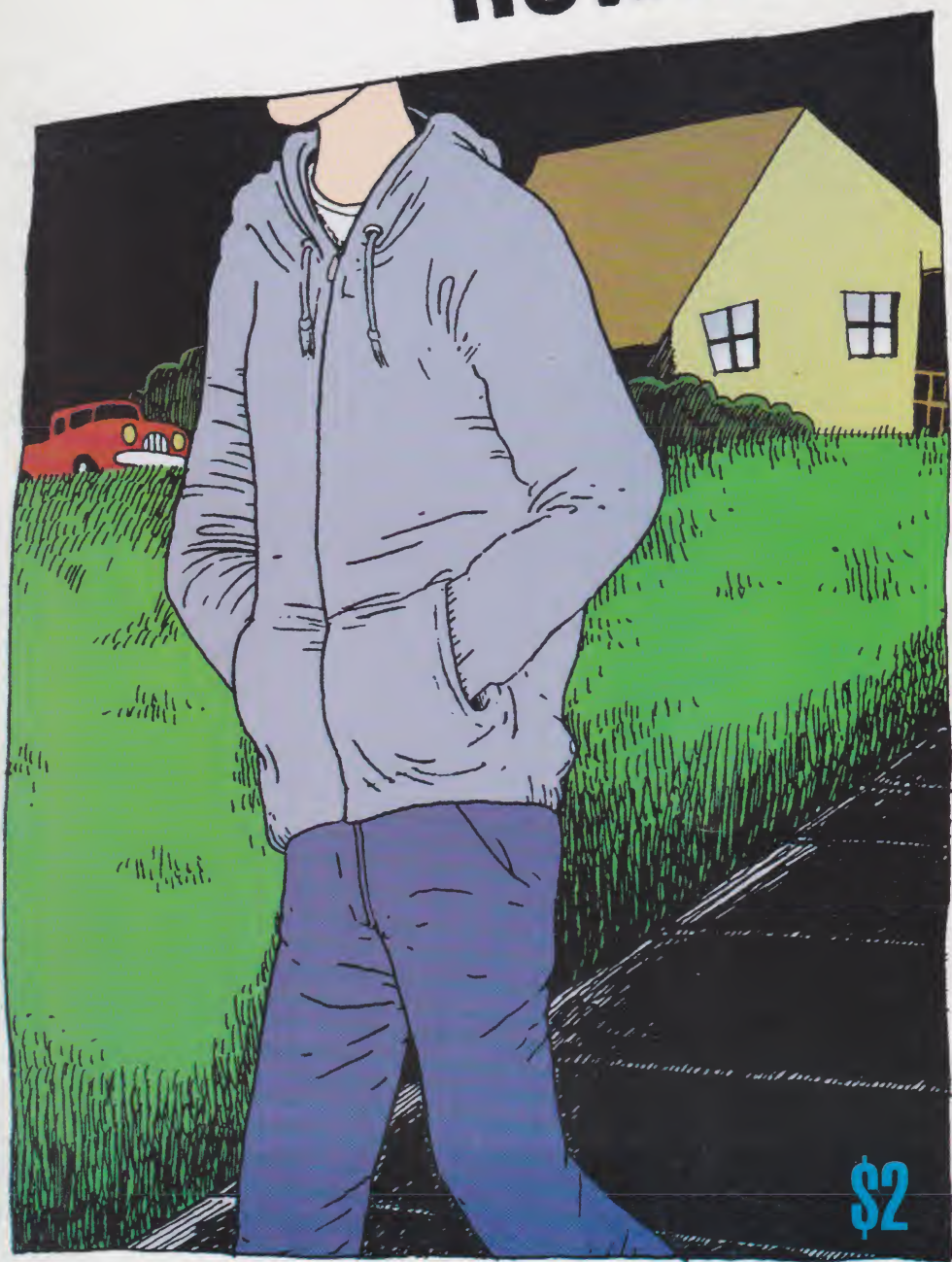
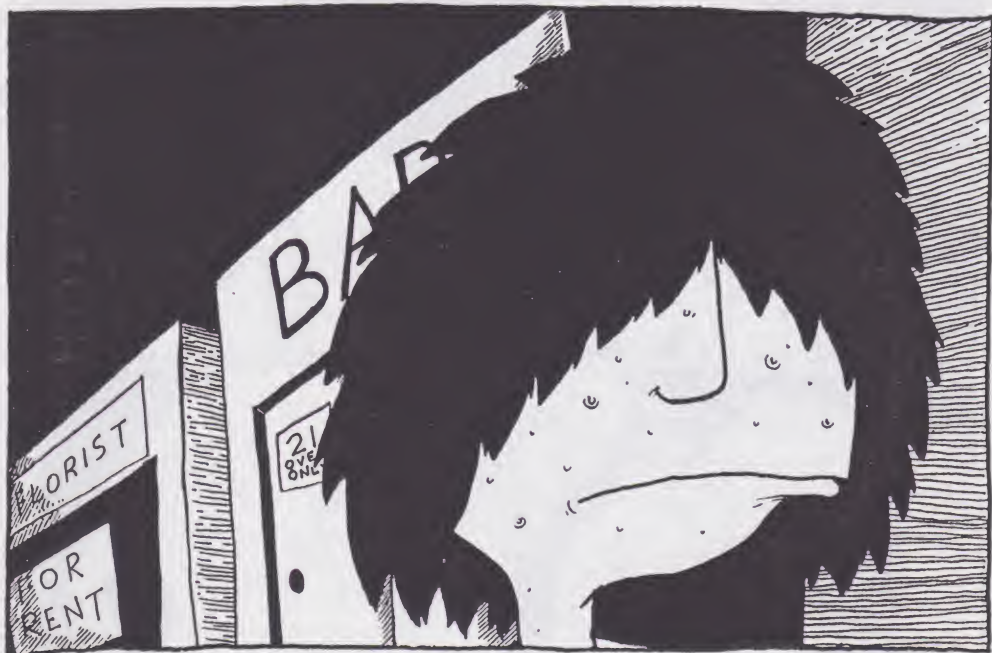


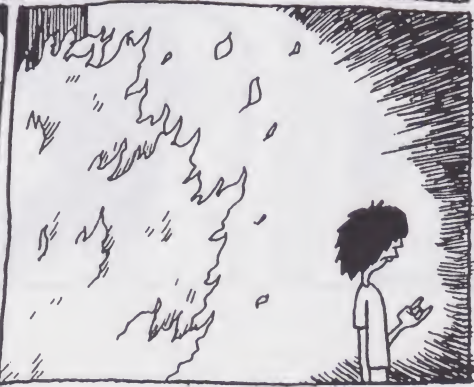
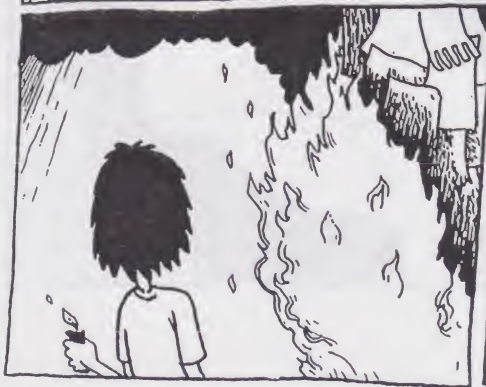
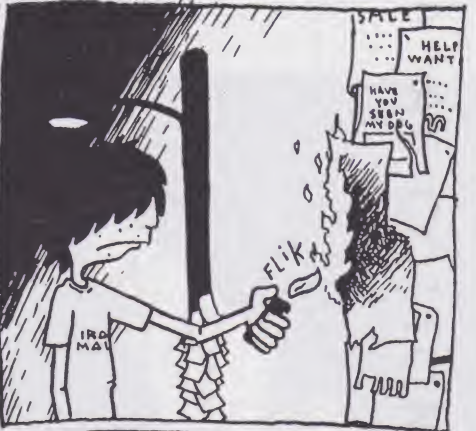
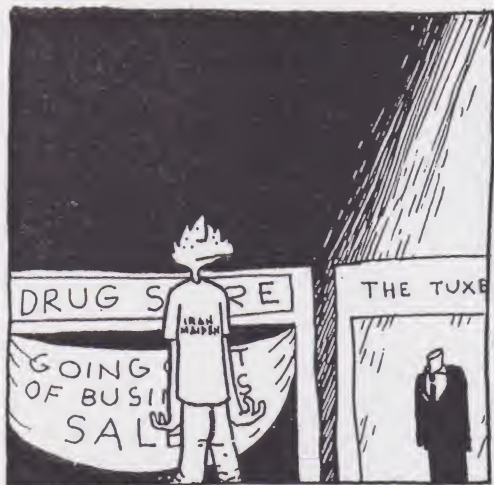
the long walk nowhere

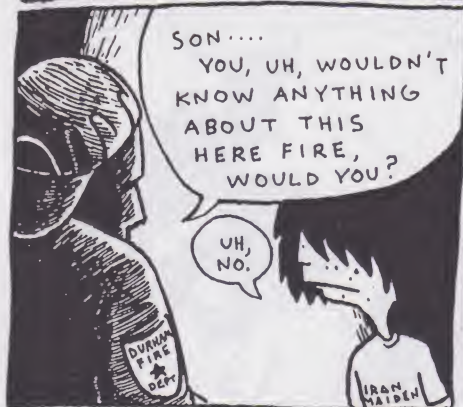


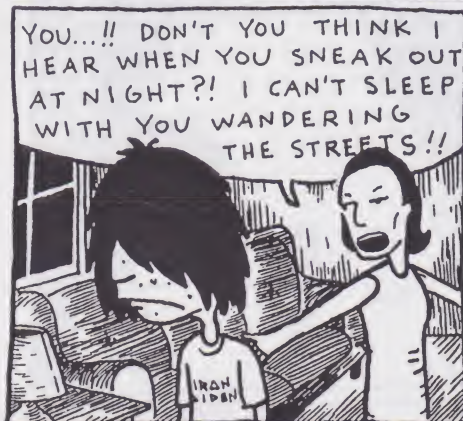
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PART ONE: THE METAL YEARS.











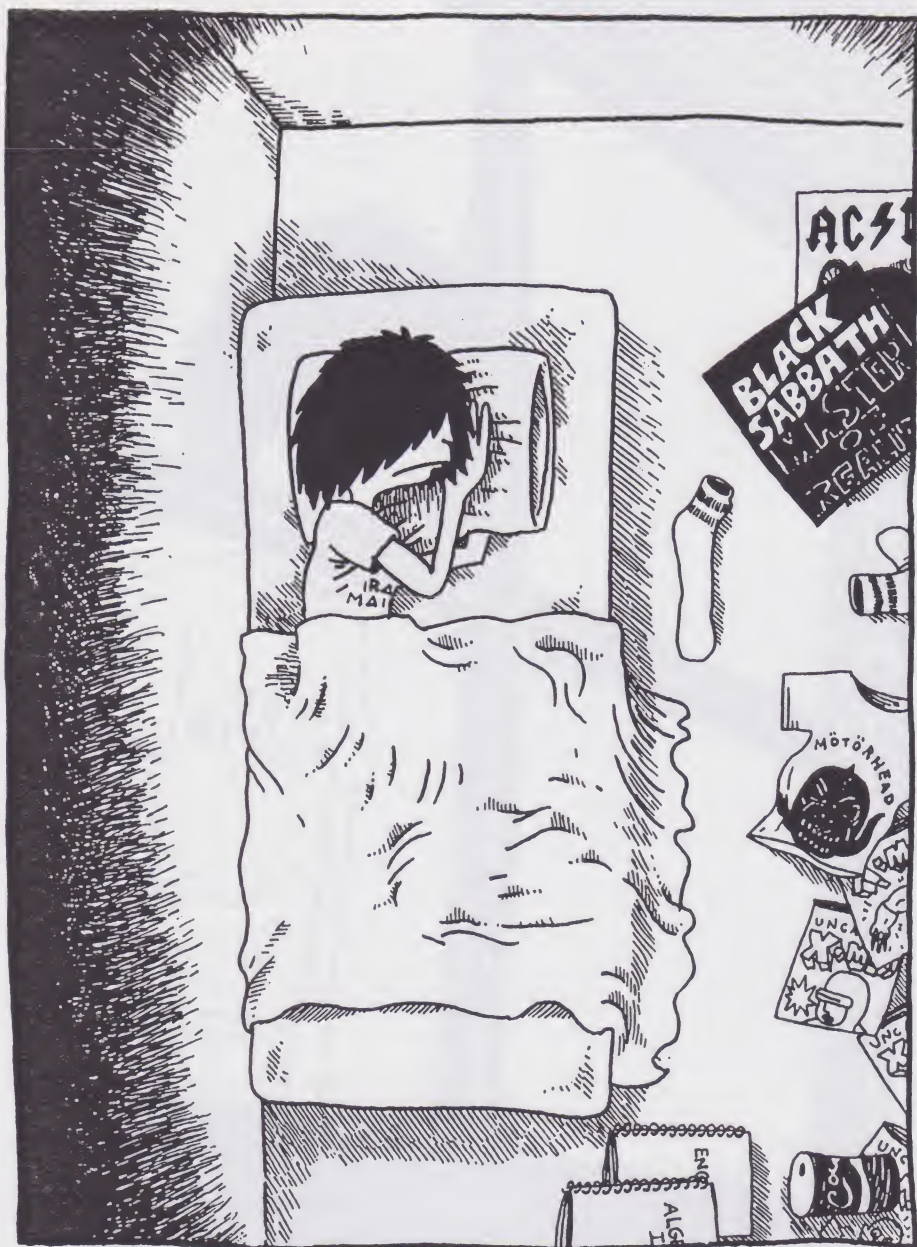
I WISH I COULD REMEMBER.....

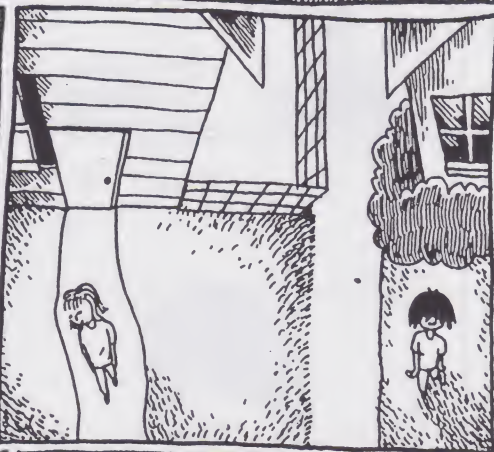
THIS WAS A LONG TIME AGO, NOW,
AND I WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHAT IT REALLY
FELT LIKE; I WISH I HAD SOMETHING MORE THAN
WHAT I HAVE — JUST HAZY IMAGES, VAGUE SEN-
SATIONS, A NAME IN A YEARBOOK, A SIDE STREET
WHICH I RECALL TRAVERSING, NAUSEA, VERTIGO.
THINGS WERE GOING TO HELL THEN, THAT'S
FOR SURE --- AS NEAR AS I CAN RECALL BEING
A TEENAGER IS ALL FIGHT OR FLIGHT. THERE WAS
THE PARENTS' DIVORCE, MY MOM'S IMPENDING
NERVOUS BREAKDOWN, THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR
WAR, THE ALMOST PATHOLOGICAL FEAR OF HAVING
AN INTERACTION WITH ANYONE YOUR OWN AGE

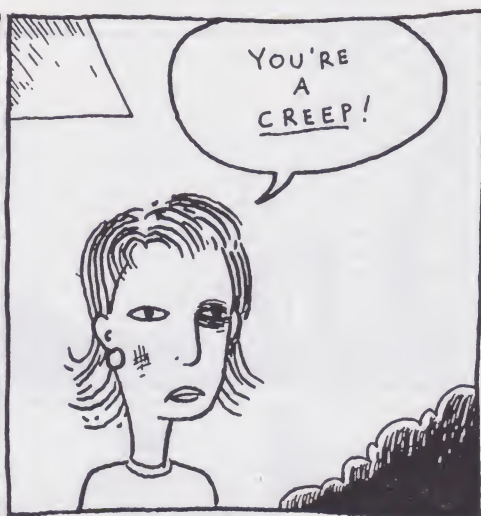
ACROSS THE STREET THE DAD, A COP (WHEN
I WAS A KID I'D GO OVER THERE TO PLAY WITH
THE NEIGHBOR KIDS AND I'D WATCH HIM CLEAN HIS
GUN) HAD JUST SPLIT AND THAT FAMILY UNIT
WAS UNRAVELING AS WELL. EVERY HOUSE SEEMED
LIKE ONE CELL IN AN ORGANISM, EACH CELL
BURSTING WITH CANCER, STRETCHING AT THE
SEAMS WITH PUS AND BILE. THE NEIGHBORHOOD,
THE CITY, THE WORLD, TRYING TO KEEP A
POKER FACE AS ITS GUTS ROTTED OUT ---

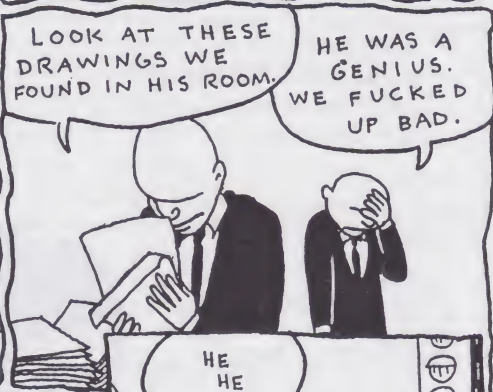
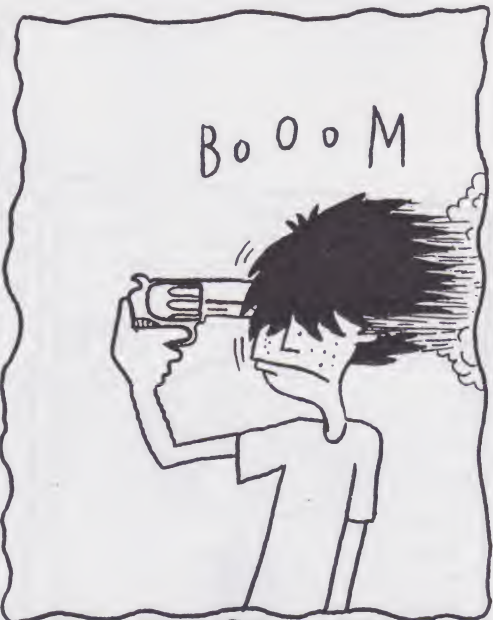
BUT THAT'S HOW IT SEEMS IN
RETROSPECT. BACK THEN? WHO CAN SAY.











FIRST GIRLFRIEND

MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND, WHEN I WAS FOURTEEN, WAS NAMED RACHEL AND WENT TO MY HIGH SCHOOL.

DENIM JACKET
(PRETTY DAMN KILLER FOR THOSE DAYS) →



IT WAS MY FIRST OR SECOND DAY OF MY FIRST YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL WHEN SHE WALKED BY AND I KIND OF GAWKILLY STARED AND GRIMACED IN THAT TEEN BOY WAY.

YAWP
HI!!!

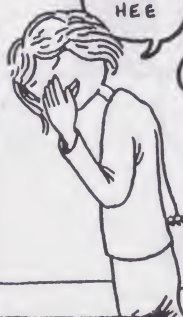


TO MY UTTER ASTONISHMENT, SHE GIGGLED AND BATTED HER EYES LIKE IT WAS ACTUALLY AWESOME THAT I WAS LEERING AT HER, RATHER THAN GROSS OR CREEPY. THIS WAS A WHOLE NEW THING TO ME.

HEE
HEE

WOAH.

HIGH
SCHOOL!



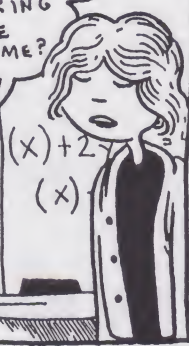
AN INCREDIBLY ARDUOUS AND INVOLVED COURTSHIP BEGAN.

SO... UM... COULD I CALL YOU SOME TIME TO... UM..

OKAY.

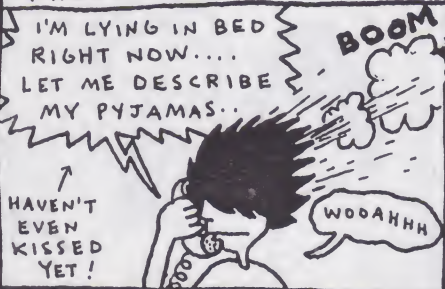
DISCUSS...UH..

TALKING
SOME
TIME?



$(X) + 2$
 (X)

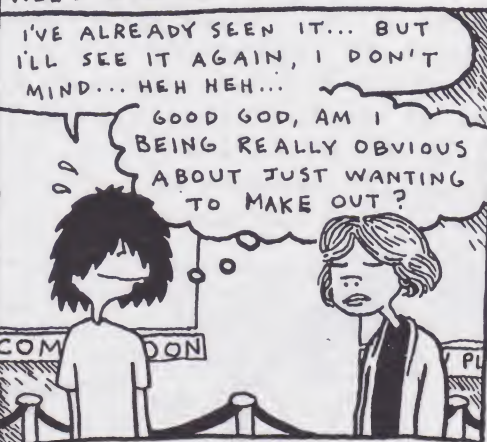
RACHEL WAS BOTH AN OLDER GIRL (FIFTEEN!) AND WHAT THEY CALL A "BAD GIRL." THIS MADE THINGS DIFFICULT TO WORK OUT - SHE GREW WEARY OF MY LACK OF ASSERTIVENESS WHILE I WAS COMPLETELY UNPREPARED FOR HER (FOR THE TIME) HEAVY PHONE INNUENDOS.



SHORTLY BEFORE ANY MAKING OUT OCCURED, THE SCENE IN PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE WHERE TWISTED SISTER MAKES A CAMEO CAME ON. I WAS, OF COURSE, AN UNRECONSTRUCTED METAL HEAD.



FINALLY WE GOT IT TOGETHER. OUR RESPECTIVE PARENTS DROVE US "UPTOWN" AND DROPPED US OFF. WE WENT ON A DATE TO A MATINEE SHOWING OF "PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE."



FINALLY, WE MADE OUT, THUS SEALING RACHEL'S FATE AS MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND, AND THE THIRD GIRL I EVER KISSED. ALSO THE FIRST SMOKER.



EVEN THOUGH I KNEW THAT RACHEL WAS A "BAD GIRL" AND SUSPECTED THAT SHE HAD GONE QUITE A WAYS IN THE WHOLE "BASE" HEIR-ARCHY OF FOOLING AROUND, I COULD NOT BRING MYSELF EVER TO GO PAST "FIRST BASE" FOR FEAR OF BEING EXPOSED AS A HORMONE- CRAZED CAD. AFTER THE MOVIE WE WALKED AROUND, HOLD-ING HANDS.



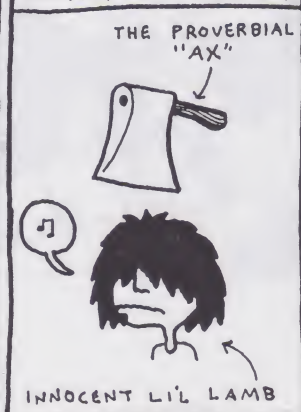
WE WENT TO BURGER KING. I WAS WAY TOO FREAKED OUT TO EAT IN HER PRESENCE.



SOON AFTER THAT, SHE ASKED ME IF I WANTED TO "TRIP" ON LSD WITH HER. I HAD NO IDEA WHAT SHE WAS TALKING ABOUT BUT SAID "SURE" TO SEEM "WITH IT." (I'M SERIOUS!) I EVEN STASHED THE DRUGS AT MY PAR-ENTS' HOUSE, WHICH WRACKED MY NERVES QUITE A BIT. WE TOOK THE ACID AT A HIGH SCHOOL PARTY THAT WEEKEND.



I SHOULD HAVE SEEN THE DUMPING COMING. BUT HOW WAS I TO KNOW? I HAD NO CONTEXT, NO RELATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO COMPARE THIS TO.



SHE SAT ME DOWN DURING LUNCH ABOUT A WEEK LATER.

IT'S JUST NOT WORKING OUT BETWEEN US. IT'S A BAD TIME FOR ME. I'M SORRY.*

WHA...? I DON'T GET IT... WHAT DID I DO? YOU DON'T LIKE ME?



*I'VE BEEN FIRED FROM JOBS WITH THIS EXACT SAME SPEECH!!

OF COURSE, I'M MUCH MORE SMOOTH ABOUT GETTING DUMPED NOW, MUCH MORE ACCOMODATING. BUT AT THE TIME I WAS CAUGHT OFF GUARD...

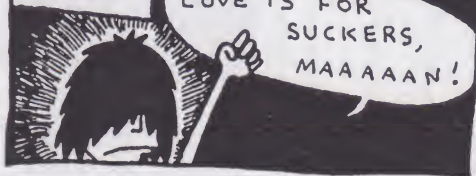
LOOK... IT'S UP TO YOU WE CAN BE FRIENDS OR YOU CAN TELL ME TO FUCK OFF.

MAN, THE CHOICE IS OBVIOUS! FUCK OFF!



I THINK SHE HAD ALREADY STARTED DATING SOMEONE ELSE, IN FACT, PROBABLY SIXTEEN (DRIVER'S LICENSE!) WELL, LIVE AND LEARN. HERE IS WHAT I LEARNED: ① CHIVALRY AND RESPECT FOR WOMEN'S VIRTUE ARE ARCHAIC CONCEPTS ② LOVE OF HEAVY METAL WILL MAKE YOU A SOCIAL PARIAH ③ DOING DRUGS WON'T MAKE YOU "COOL" ④ AND, IN THE WORDS OF TWISTED SISTER:

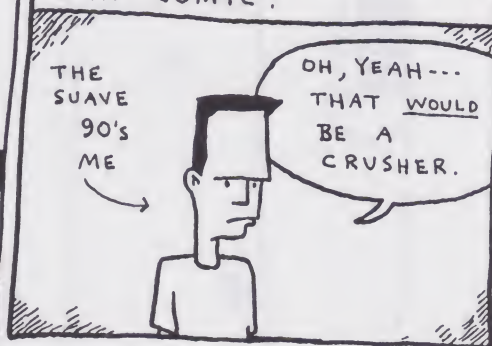
LOVE IS FOR SUCKERS, MAAAAAN!



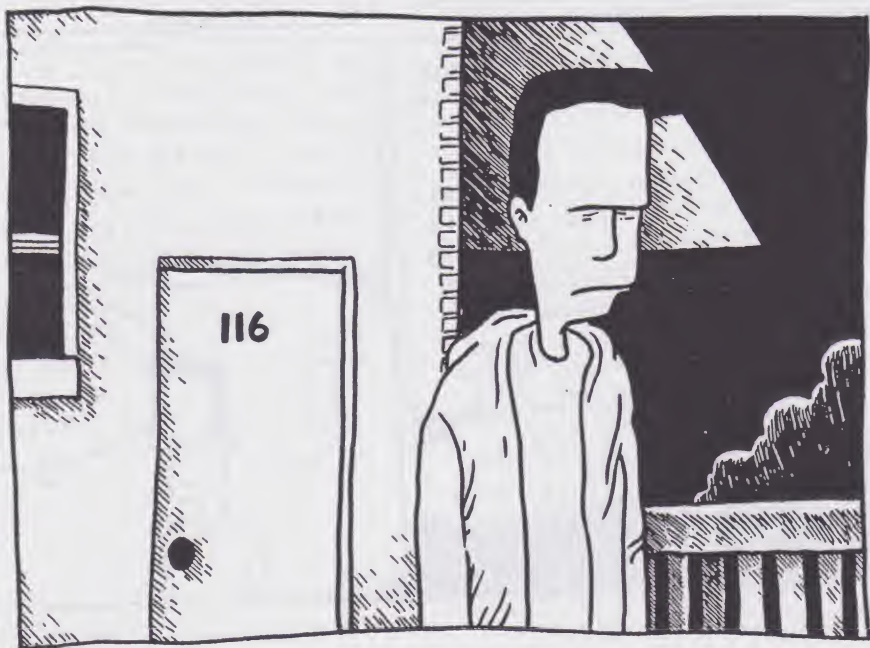
OF COURSE, I'M WELL OVER ALL THAT NOW -- I WONDER WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT GIRL? I NEVER SEE HER AROUND --- OH MAN, I HOPE SHE NEVER SEES THIS COMIC!

THE SUAVE 90's ME

OH, YEAH... THAT WOULD BE A CRUSHER.



PART TWO: THE FILLER YEARS. .



I HAVE THIS THEORY ABOUT PEOPLE WHICH IS THAT EVERYONE IS DESIGNED, SPIRITUALLY, TO BE A CERTAIN AGE, AND IT'S ONLY THE IMPERFECTION OF BIOLOGY WHICH MAKES US LIVE ALL THE FILLER YEARS.



TAKE ALL THOSE GUYS WHO WERE HOT SHIT IN JUNIOR HIGH... YOU SEE THEM EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, STILL FIGHTING THEIR DUMB JUNIOR HIGH COOL GUY BATTLES, PUMPING GAS AT THE CITGO WITH THAT DAZED LOOK OF DULL SHOCK, WONDERING WHAT WENT WRONG.



HEY, WELCOME TO MY HOME TOWN. I THOUGHT I'D SHOW YOU AROUND. CHAPEL HILL, NORTH CAROLINA: MAINLY THERE'S JUST A BIG COLLEGE, A FEW GOOD BANDS HAVE COME FROM HERE, BUT FOR THE MOST PART IT'S PRETTY SLOW AND BORING. I LIVE RIGHT "DOWNTOWN" (AS IT WERE) SO WE'LL HEAD RIGHT TO THE HIGH-LIGHTS. EXXON STATION, KINKOS, A COUPLE OF BARS... "HE'S NOT HERE," FRAT BOY HELL ON EARTH... OH, THERE'S MY JOB, COPYTRON - I WORK THERE ABOUT TEN HOURS A WEEK. (I'LL BE FIRED BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS.)



THIS PARKING LOT HERE IS ADJACENT TO ALL THESE CUTESY COLLEGE SHOPPES-- OVERSEEN BY FASCIST PARKING ATTENDANTS WHO WON'T LET YOU PARK HERE DURING FOOTBALL GAMES. DAMN THAT UNIVERSITY! HEH HEH... BEING A "TOWNIE" ROCKS.



I MENTION THE FATE OF THE JUNIOR HIGH COOL GUYS, BECAUSE THIS IS A VERY REAL ISSUE WHEN YOU LIVE IN A TOWN YOU GREW UP AROUND-- I LITERALLY DO SEE PEOPLE I'VE KNOWN ALL MY LIFE, PUMPING GAS, GETTING MASTERS' DEGREES, SLIDING INEXORABLY INTO ALCOHOLISM, AND SO ON.



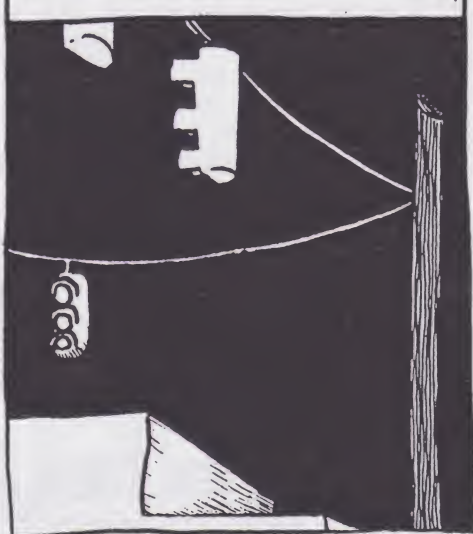
THE COOLEST GUY IN MY HIGH SCHOOL, THE GUY WHO'D WEAR A HÜSKER DÜ T-SHIRT AND I'D GO BUY THE RECORD THE NEXT DAY, JUST KILLED HIMSELF, ACTUALLY. THE LAST TIME I SAW HIM, HE SAID HE ENVIED ME THAT I'D GOTTEN OUT OF TOWN. ME! THE GUY WHO STOLE HIS MUSICAL TASTES.



I LEAVE, BUT I ALWAYS COME BACK. IT'S EASY TO CRACK THE SYSTEM HERE-- THERE'S LOTS OF FREE FOOD, I HAVE NICE HOUSE-MATES (ALL SEVEN OF THEM), LIVING IS CHEAP AND EXPECTATIONS ARE LOW.



AND OF COURSE, THIS ALL HAS ME TERRIBLY WORRIED.



FALL IS SETTING IN; MY HOUSEMATE POINTS OUT THE DORKY SWEATSHIRTS WE ALL WEAR, AND I WONDER HOW LONG I'LL WEAR DORKY SWEATSHIRTS. I'M TWENTY-SIX AND MAYBE THIS IS IT FOR ME. SWEATSHIRTS....



SOMETIMES I GET SO BUMMED OUT, WALKING AROUND TOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT FOR NO REASON, LIKE I HAVE BEEN FOR YEARS.



WOAH! HE HE... GETTING A LITTLE HEAVY THERE, SORRY. BACK TO THE SCENIC TOUR... HERE WE HAVE THE MAIN INTERSECTION, FRANKLIN AND COLUMBIA. YOU GOT A BANK, A STARBUCKS, A GAP, MORE BARS.... UGH... A FEW YEARS AGO THINGS WERE A LITTLE COOLER HERE, BEFORE ALL THESE FRANCHISES MOVED IN TO CONVERT THIS STRIP INTO A GENERIC COLLEGE CONSUMER ZONE.



THERE'S A COUPLE DECENT RECORD STORES DOWN THIS WAY... SOME COFFEE SHOPS AND SUCH. I GUESS THIS WOULD BE MORE PRODUCTIVE IF IT WASN'T THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, SO THAT SOMETHING WAS OPEN. SORRY.



ON THE PLUS SIDE, THOUGH, WE
GET TO AVOID THE BULK OF
HUMANITY — THE REAL COCK-
SUCKERS, THE COLLEGE JERKS,
I DON'T KNOW --- THE TEEMING
HORDES THAT FILL THE STREET
BY DAY.



GIVE ME SOME LITHIUM AND
AND ONE OF THOSE GO-CARTS..
I'D PROBABLY BE A PRODUCTIVE
MEMBER OF SOCIETY, TOO.



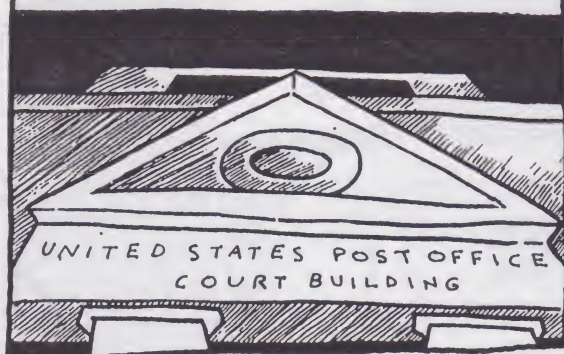
YEP — IT'S PRETTY DESOLATE
AROUND 5:30 AM. THERE'S A
GUY IN A STREET-SWEEPER
MOBILE, CRUISING AROUND. HEY,
THAT LOOKS FUN — DOING
DONUTS IN THE MIDDLE OF
FRANKLIN STREET, BLOWING
AROUND LEAVES.



YEAH. PRETTY DESOLATE.



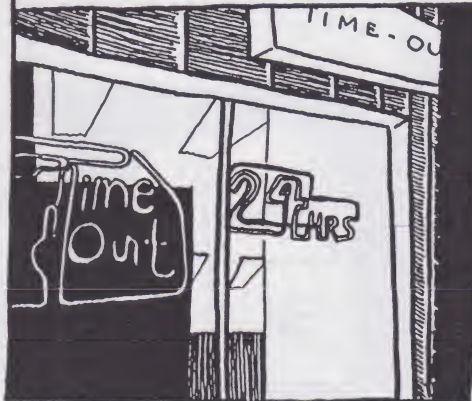
RIGHT HERE'S THE POST OFFICE / COURT HOUSE, BY THE WAY.... OH, THE STORIES I COULD TELL... BY DAY THE STEPS ARE SWARMING WITH TEENAGERS. I MYSELF DID A FEW YEARS' TIME ON THESE STEPS.... THE BASEMENT OF THE POST OFFICE HOUSES A TEEN CENTER WHERE HIGH SCHOOL BANDS PLAY.



LET'S HEAD BACK UP THE OTHER WAY --- MAYBE WE'LL SEE SOME GOOD SHIT UP THERE.



AH, "TIME OUT" — THIS IS PRETTY MUCH THE ONLY 24 HOUR ESTABLISHMENT IN CHAPEL HILL... THEY SPECIALIZE IN GRISTLY CHICKEN, CONSUMED PRIMARILY BY THE LOCAL CRACK-HEADS. LOOK, THERE'S PEOPLE PASSED OUT IN THERE RIGHT NOW, SPRAWLED ON THE COUNTER.



OH, I GUESS WE COULD ALWAYS WALK OVER TO THE HARRIS-TEETER (DON'T LAUGH... THIS IS THE SOUTH) TO GET LATE-NIGHT EIGHT-FOR-A-DOLLAR DONUTS. BUT THAT'S ALL THE WAY IN CARRBORO — A FULL TEN MINUTE WALK AWAY.



AH, WELL....



BACK UP BY MY HOUSE: THE GREYHOUND STATION IS A GOOD 30 SECOND WALK FROM MY FRONT DOOR AND THIS IS ALWAYS IMMENSELY COMFORTING.

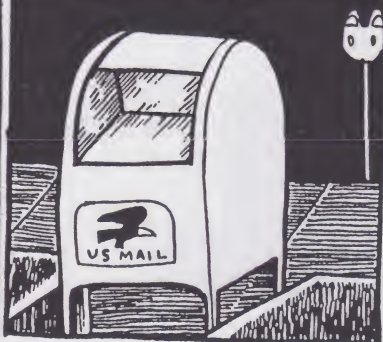


THIS IS A MAGICAL TIME OF MORNING—THE BRIEF INTERLUDE IN COMMERCE, THE SERENE MOMENT BETWEEN THE MASSAGE PARLOR CLOSING DOWN AND THE LEFT-WING BOOKSTORE NEXT DOOR OPENING UP.



WHAT A BIZARRE MODE OF EXISTENCE.....

I'LL PROBABLY END UP GETTING UP AROUND FOUR IN THE AFTER-NOON. MY LIFE INCREASINGLY BECOMES LIKE ONE OF THOSE TWILIGHT ZONE EPISODES WHERE EVERYONE BUT ME HAS BEEN VAPORIZED BY THE NEUTRON BOMB.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE NEUTRON
BOMB, THE A-BOMB, THE
HYDROGEN BOMB, ANYWAY?
ROD STERLING... WHAT
A CREEP.



WELL, ROD, YOU KNOW WHERE
TO FIND ME IF YOU NEED
SOMEONE TO WANDER AROUND
LOOKING PERTURBED.



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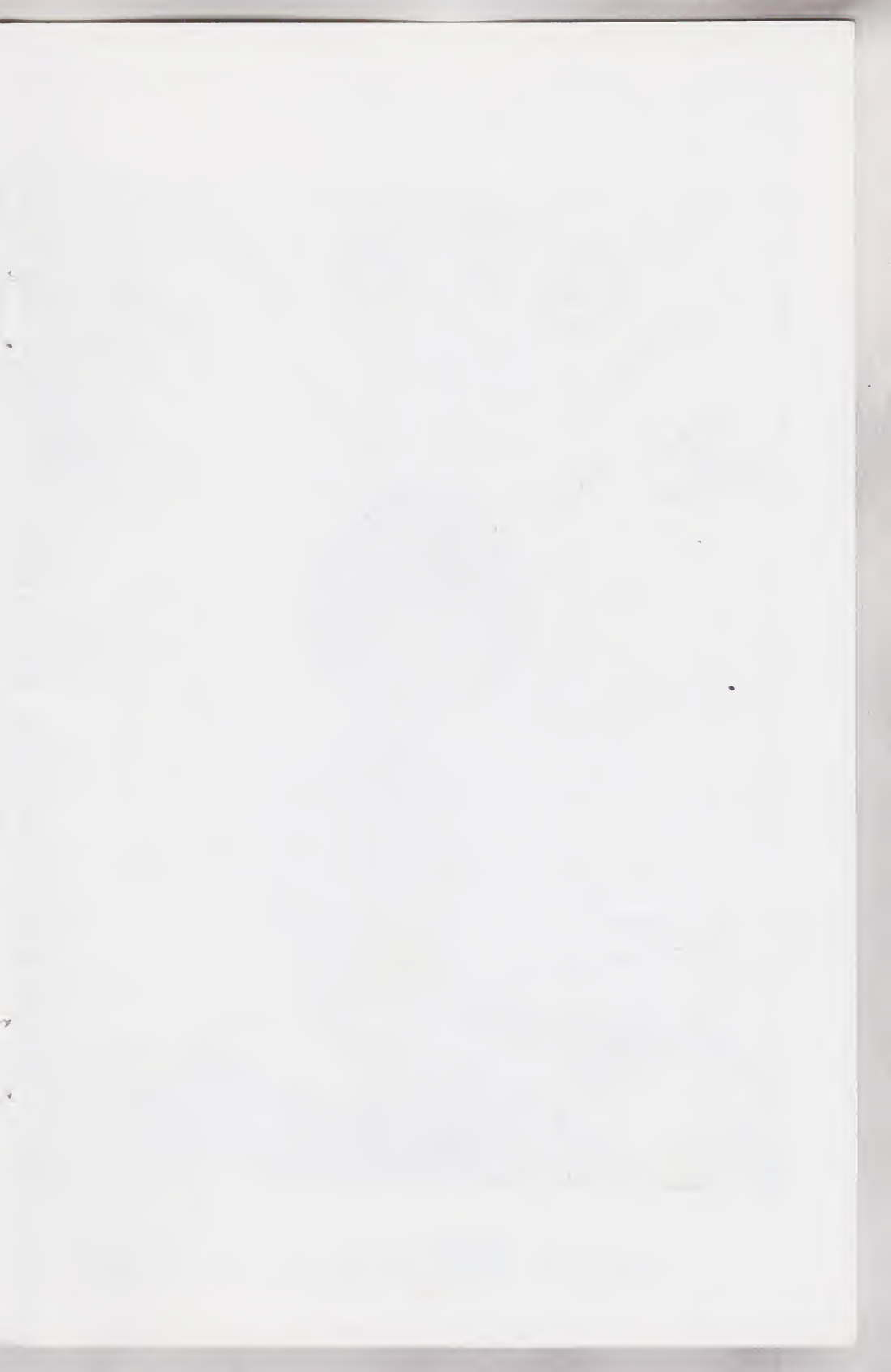
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